



NEWSLETTER OF THE CASTLECRAG PROGRESS ASSOCIATION

No. 93

Seventy Years of community development
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CASTLECRAG SCHOOL: Down but Not Out

President's Report

Elizabeth Lander

The Progress Association's seventieth year promises to be a tumultuous one. Residents will be aware that the Castlecrag Infants School site has been sold to a private school, the Glenaeon Rudolph Steiner School, by the State Government for \$825,000. The immediate appearance of security guards and locked gates provided a graphic demonstration that the our main area of public open space in the suburb - the *HEART* of our community - has been privatised. The Development Application (DA) by Glenaeon to use the site as a kindergarten and primary school was passed by Willoughby Council on 2 May, despite concern by residents over the impact of increased traffic into the suburb and the fact that the Department of Planning had not responded to Council's request to rezone the site to "Special Use: Education".

Our community has fought for almost six years for the school and to retain the site as public open space. Bureaucrats have frustrated these efforts and deals have been done behind closed doors which are clearly against the interests of this community, the people of Willoughby and the public of New South Wales. A private school has been granted privileges not available to others and our community has been denied natural justice. Under the current zoning, the site can be used for medium density housing and is valued at \$4-5 million. Moreover, we now find that the Education Department has delivered us the ultimate indignity of including the school contents - which cover the books and equipment provided for our children through the efforts of the community - in the contract to sell the site to a private school.

These wrongs will be put right. There is a legal challenge to the sale in the Supreme Court and we have a strong case against the actions of the Minister before the Independent Commission Against Corruption.

But, there are also many other current issues of concern to our community. Willoughby Council are reviewing their policies and planning controls in response to changed circumstances and the new Local Government Act. Under the Willoughby City Consolidating Instrument, changes to zoning have been made to provide stronger protection to harbour foreshores and other sensitive environmental areas. The Department of Planning has certified the Instrument and it is to go on public display. Much of Castlecrag is now zoned 2 (a2) and has been exempted from Dual Occupancy by the Minister. Council is classifying all council-owned land and preparing management plans for community land. The Association is seeking to ensure that all Castlecrag's public walkways and reserves are covered. Draft LEPs and DCPs for Heritage and Conservation and for Areas Adjoining Bushland are currently in the public consultation stage. A hard-working committee has also been reviewing our own control instrument, DCP3 (Castlecrag). The outcome of these planning innovations will have a profound impact on the future character and quality of our city and neighbourhood.

The other major factors influencing our quality of life are traffic and transport. The threat of a tollway to Castlecrag brought 400 people to a rally at

Sugarloaf Point on 10 April. Mr Baird appears to have changed his mind once again and has shunted the issue to a Section 22 Committee which will help assess the transport options for the Warringah Peninsula. Bob McKillop has been nominated as a community representative for this Committee by the Progress Association and the Federation of Willoughby Progress Associations (and also the Coalition for Urban Transport Sanity).

Traffic congestion and pollutions are major problems facing the people of Willoughby. The Progress Association supports an integrated approach to land use and transport planning with improved public transport. We met with the Mayor and senior Council officers in late 1993 to discuss strategic planning concepts for Willoughby city based on higher density living around neighbourhood centres which are served by public transport. Following these discussions, Willoughby Council is formulating a city development and physical planning strategy which will:

- predominate higher density housing along transport nodes;
- maximise flexible use of existing developments;
- minimise traffic movements within Willoughby City Council and the regional area; and
- maintain the existing soft landscape amenity of the city.

Council is now working on a transport/traffic strategy. This process will involve a high level of community participation and the Progress Association looks forward to an active involvement.

To celebrate our 70 years of existence we held our Annual General Meeting in March at *The Guizar* restaurant where we were privileged to have Leonard Teale as our guest speaker and poet, teller par excellence. Joyce Batterham became a Life Member of our Association in recognition of her more than fifty years of service to our community. More than anyone, Joyce worked to establish the Castlecrag Infants' School. All who attended had a most enjoyable evening and requested that our next AGM be a similar occasion!

The Progress Association recognises the many lifestyles and attitudes found in our suburb and most cordially invites you to attend and participate in our General Meetings at the Castlecrag Community Centre. These are held on the fourth Tuesday of every second month at 8pm. New members are always very welcome. Our next meeting will be held on 24th May and our guest speaker will be Geoff Verco who will speak on the Rating System as it applies in NSW and particularly in the City of Willoughby.

My thanks to all of you who have volunteered to be Committee members this year but especially to

Howard Rubie who worked so ably as our President for the last two years and to Councillor Sue Randle who has unstintingly represented us before Willoughby Council.

Your Committee for this year is:

President: Elizabeth Lander
 Vice President: Howard Rubie
 Vice President: Bob McKillop
 Secretary: Andrew Frazer
 Treasurer: Diana Jones
 Minutes Secretary: Kate Westoby
 Committee: Tom Boyce, Laurence Natale, Gay Spies, Harold Spies, Sean Lander
 Editors of The Crag: Helen Levett, Kerry McKillop.

The next meeting of the Castlecrag Progress Association will be held at the Community Centre, corner The Postern and The Rampart, on Tuesday 24th May at 8pm. All welcome!!

CASTLECRAG LIBRARY

The Community Centre, The Rampart

TUESDAYS 3.30-4.30pm

THURSDAYS 1-5pm

SATURDAYS 10am-Noon

NEW BOOKS LIST:

RENDELL, R	A Crocodile Bird
FRANCIS, C	Deceit
DEXTER, C	Morse's Greatest Mystery
ALLBEURY, T	The Line Crossing
HALL, R	The Grisley Wife
ROWE, J	Stranglehold
WOUK, H	The Hope
PARFITT, T	Journey to the Lost City
BLACK, C	A Life in Progress
MILES, S	A Right Royal Bastard
BOGARDE, D	A Short Walk from Harrods
LORD, J	Picasso and Dora
D'ALPUGET, B	White Eye
CALVINO, I	The Road to San Guianni
TROLLOPE, J	A Castle in Italy
" "	A Village Affair
STEEL, D	Accident
CLARKE, L	Alice's Masque
FAULKS, S	Birdsong
READERS DIGEST	Complete Australian Birds
COOKSON, C	The Golden Straw
HANSEN, D	Lunch with the Generals
FORBES, C	The Power
NORMAN, L	Empire of the Past; Indonesia
HARDING, M	Footloose in the Himalayas
NEWBY, E	What the Traveller Saw
BENSEN, H	A Dissolving Dream
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LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

Dear Editors,

After four and a half years of struggle we face defeat. Residents will have noticed the large signs that have been wired to the fence our public school: **WARNING THESE PREMISES ARE PROTECTED BY GROUP 4 SECURITAS**. They have been erected by Glenaeon, a private organisation that has signed a contract with the State government to buy this superb piece of public property for \$825,000, which is less than one-fifth of its market value. This is legalised theft. It is a public scandal. None of the proper procedures of inviting tenders has been followed. The City of Willoughby Council has "expressed its regret" but is powerless. Mr Peter Collins, our State Member of Parliament, has failed to take any effective action. Mr Bob Carr, the leader of the Opposition, has not denounced this outrageous sale of public property in the Parliament.

The financial aspect is disgraceful. But the sale of a public school to a private organisation is a major, severe and permanent loss to our cultural heritage. Until the time when the school was closed, wrongly, it had been at the heart of local endeavours, a focal point where the parents and citizens worked alongside the teachers to foster the education of our children. Now all that faces extinction. Castlecrag is forever deprived - the Glenaeon persuasion is insular.

I am a Castlecrag resident of nearly 40 years. My mother, the teachers and the whole community worked together to establish my infant values. Unfortunately, since closure of the school my last daughter was unable to receive the same sort of community support. Our last hope is the action being taken in the Supreme Court to restrain the execution of the sale. Altogether this entire scandal is a pitiful commentary of the state of centralist authority against which democracy is powerless.

Gavin Thomas.

The Crag has received a letter from our local member Peter Collins on the Warringah Tollway issue. This letter was published in the *North Shore Times* on 5 May, so we will not reproduce it in full here. We note that Mr Collins argues that environmental concerns and technological changes render obsolete any proposal for a bridge linking Castlecrag and Seaforth. Mr Collins then states:

I can safely promise to "stop the bulldozers" at Castlecrag because there won't be any need there to build a bridge. That sword that has hung over the heads of Castlecrag residents for thirty or forty years has now been removed.

CASTLECRAG RESIDENT HONOURED

Congratulations to popular Castlecrag resident Neville Milston who has been made a life governor of the Benevolent Society of NSW in recognition of his work for the Society.

BUSH DANCE

Saturday 18 June, From 5.30 pm

CASTLECRAG COMMUNITY CENTRE
Live Band/ Refreshments
Available

Adults \$10.50, children \$5, Family \$25
RSVP Elizabeth Lander 958 5384
Sue Randle 958 6344

Leonard Teale 1922-1994

The Castlecrag community is saddened at the sudden death of Leonard Teale on 14 May. Leonard was an active supporter of our community and its interests. He was guest speaker at the AGM of the Progress Association on 30th March. We will write more fully on his life in Castlecrag in the next issue of the newsletter.



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Castlecrag Conservation Society - President's Report to AGM

Recently as I was looking through newspaper clippings collected over the last ten years, two things became clear: firstly, the increase in environmental news in the *Sydney Morning Herald* since 1981 and secondly, the striking decrease in such matters in the two local papers, the *Northern Herald* and *North Shore Times*. A contradiction! There is no doubt that environmental awareness and concern has increased in the general population. However, it is not reflected in the local news. Is it due to the economic recession pushing environmental matters to one side by governments and business? Certainly there is "lip service" paid to the natural environment. Governments at all levels profess concern but turning this into environmental action is another matter; it is harder to change attitudes and hence no action is taken. Is this a correct analysis of the current situation?

Look at the situation in Willoughby; in the last decade Council employed a Bushland Officer and some Bush Regenerators. After a lot of prodding a Bushland Management Plan was developed and adopted. This plan has been under review by the Bushland Management Review Committee over the last three years. Committee members have worked very hard, despite some frustrating delays. The Draft *DCP for Development Adjacent to Bushland* has aroused fears among many residents, fears based on misinformation and mischievous statements by developers and some with legal interest. This DCP is a great step forward; Council is to be congratulated. The DCP should be given every support as should the *Heritage LEP*, as both documents aim to protect our built and natural environment.

One may say that Council is becoming greener, despite the entrenched attitudes of some past and present Councillors who don't value our bushland. However there is still a long way to go. The amount of money allocated to caring for the bush is low in proportion to the amount allocated for parks and playing fields. This attitude will only change for the better when the majority of our residents place an equal if not higher value on our bushland.

Here in Castlecrag there has always been a core of conservationists, starting with Walter Burley Griffin and extending in later years to others, especially Beverley Blacklock, whom we honoured with the opening of the Beverley Blacklock Foreshore Reserve in February. Beverley achieved results on a personal level by convincing people of the beauty and value of native plants and gardens which in turn made them conscious of the importance of the surrounding native bushland.

During 1993, the Society has endeavoured to keep the environmental message prominent via letters and submissions to Council, State and Federal parliaments. We responded on issues ranging from rainforest timbers, population growth, threatened species, South-east forests to the DCP on Development Adjacent to Bushland. We also spoke out on any development which may have damaged native habitat, including 177 Edinburgh Road, 19 The Citadel, Oriel Reserve, 349 Edinburgh Road, 233 Edinburgh Road, 1 The Scarp and 136 Edinburgh Road. And of course through our newsletter *Conservation Up-Date*. In most of these cases a satisfactory solution has not been reached. However, I am convinced that the constant "drip, drip, drip" will have a cumulative effect in days to come.

Two major issues which the Society has supported over the years have been the Castlecrag Infants School and the foreshore cottages. In this, we have cooperated with the Progress Association, SOS*Crag and the foreshore residents. As you are aware through *Conservation UpDate* and *The Crag*, decisions on these two issues are reaching a critical point and need your continued support.

We hope that our Significant Tree Register will be finalised soon when, under the guidance of Howard Rubie, we will combine with the Progress Association to produce a video and photographic record of all the streetscapes in Castlecrag.

Again, special thanks to the Progress Association for its moral and financial support. The Society was born in the folds of the Association and feels a close affinity with its aims and objectives. We have also supported the Walter Burley Griffin Society in its activities, for one of our constitution objectives is to "preserve the Walter Burley Griffin Estate."

What we achieve in Castlecrag complements the activities of other local environmental groups in nearby municipalities and adds to the pool of environmental awareness at the state, national and international levels. We may only be a ripple in that pool, but the backbone of the conservation movement is action at the local level and a ripple can become a tidal wave.

Conservation Society Meeting
Wednesday 20 July; 8 pm
Community Centre
"Microscopes - old and new:
Development of the Cell Theory"

Living with Bushland in the Suburbs

Gay Spies

Bushfire, of the intensity experienced in January, is a relatively uncommon occurrence in urban areas. Whereas people living on the urban fringe are more ready to accept that fire is an inevitable part of living with the Australian bush, those in areas closer to the city find this harder to acknowledge. Fear and feelings of helplessness, based on the unpredictability of the situation, resulted in anger and a readiness to look for scapegoats.

The most obvious kneejerk response has been to blame or threaten authorities or to regard environmentalists as responsible for the fires, in the misguided notion that councils have neglected, or environmentalists stopped, prescribed burning. This is based on the totally false premise that prescribed burning, and/or clearing of bushland, will guarantee personal safety. So what is the situation?

Cause of the fires. A combination of high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds created ideal fire conditions following a period of low rainfall. Official statements blame arson for 70-80% of the recent NSW bushfires, including three attempts nears Brown's Waterhole in the Lane Cove Valley. National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) state that 90% of fires in National Parks were caused by arson or negligence.

No particular group stopped prescribed burning. For safety reasons prescribed burning can only take place between 1st April and 30th September, when vegetation is often too moist to burn. Prescribed burning as a precautionary measure was only prevented on two 'no burn' days in 1993 under the Clean Air Act.

Natural areas differ in the risk they pose to properties. Small urban bushland areas differ from large natural areas including national parks and their fire management requirements will differ also.

Frequent fire, whether naturally occurring or prescribed burning, will permanently change plant and animal communities. Some plant species will be lost while fire-tolerant species may come to dominate and the fire hazard increase.

The natural fire regime of Hawkesbury Sandstone vegetation (such as we have in most of Willoughby) is regarded as between 12 and 20 years. It may take as long as this for some plant species to mature and produce seed. If burnt before this, these species will be lost. In other vegetation types, the fire regime may be as long as 300 years.

Bushfire Terminology

What type of fire are we talking about?

To avoid confusion, the type of fire we refer to needs to be clear. Backburning is often misleadingly applied to all planned fires.

Prescribed burning refers to fires deliberately lit by land managers to achieve a specific goal. There are two main types:

Fuel reduction or hazard reduction fires aim to burn fuel loads (eg dead plant matter) under controlled conditions at the most appropriate time for the purposes of protecting life and property.

Ecological fires manipulate vegetation structure, and may be of high intensity to achieve greatest effect on unwanted plants.

Unplanned fires refer to all other fires, they may be escaped prescribed burns, caused naturally or result from an accident or arson.

Backburning is one of the tools used for direct fire suppression of unplanned fires, lit close to the oncoming fire front.

Many factors must be considered in assessing hazard and risk. These include slope, aspect, vegetation type, fuel structure, fuel load (ie weight of fine fuel, less than 6mm diameter, expressed as tonnes per hectare), reserve size and shape, potential ignition sources, predicted summer fire weather conditions, fire history. In Willoughby, reserves are small and narrow and mostly oriented east-west. Slopes greater than 20° are common.

All local council areas with bushland should have a Bushland Management Plan which incorporates a Fire Management Plan. The following is taken from Willoughby Council's Plan of Management for its Bushland Reserves section on Fire Management by fire ecologist Roger Good (pp57-64):

- The greatest fuel hazards in the reserves occur at the bushland interface where garden refuse and other waste is excessively dumped.
- Planned burning within areas of natural bushland in the reserves should only be implemented for very specific objectives eg vegetation management. Prescribed burning for fuel management would achieve very little as the reserves are very small in total area. To be effective at all the entire area of each reserve would have to be prescribed burned on a 2-3 year frequency, untenable for ecological, biological and aesthetic reasons as a continued blackened landscape is totally unacceptable.
- If prescribed burning was deemed necessary for defined fuel management problem it would be

almost impossible to implement within acceptable limits of prescribed burning.

- The regular burning of areas with a heavy shrub understorey would perpetuate a fire hazardous vegetation, and with increasing shrub density the potential for fire ignition would increase.
- Most houses destroyed during wildfire events do so through fire brands blown from considerable distances (8-10km) and seldom from reserve areas adjacent to the houses affected.
- It must be appreciated by all parties including landholders, Council and fire suppression authorities, that on days of high to extreme fire weather, bushland reserves would be rapidly burnt out even where prescribed burning for fuel reduction may have been carried out over the entire area of any reserve.

Clearing of fire breaks. The same conditions apply as for prescribed burns. In mild weather on appropriate terrain etc even a small firebreak, eg 1m, can contain a prescribed burn. The recent wildfires jumped 6 lane highways at Ourimbah, Brooklyn and also the Hawkesbury River so clearing breaks in small reserves is of dubious benefit. This same applies to firetrails.

Fire resistant plants. The notion that we can be protected by planting fire resistant species only leads to a false sense of security. If the fire is hot enough all plants will burn. It is far better to concentrate on protection of the actual dwelling and immediate surrounds. It is important to prevent a fire 'ladder' from understorey to the canopy.

Importance of trees. Fire personnel and NPWS authorities at the post-fire public meetings in West Chatswood stressed the importance of retaining trees (much to the surprise/dismay of some). They explained their value: reduction of wind speed up to four fold; reduction in air temperature; help retain moisture in the understorey; function as a filter for flying embers. They also pointed out dead timber or dead standing trees play no role in rate of spread nor intensity of fire. They may burn slowly after a fire front has passed but can then be put out. As dead standing trees provide valuable habitat for native fauna their removal on fire hazard grounds cannot be justified.

The main contributor to fire intensity and rate of spread is not trees or logs but fine 'fuel' less than pencil thickness (6mm). Its arrangement and moisture content is also important. Residents need to take responsibility for their own weed removal. On private property and at the urban bushland interface, manual methods such as selective hand clearing are more appropriate than prescribed burning. As the name implies, this involves more discretion than broad area clearing and can be used to maintain an area's pleasant appearance.

Bushland management. In small urban reserves fire management should be an integral part of bushland management, with fire being used to maintain particular vegetation types and where appropriate to reduce piles of removed weeds. Any weed removal programme requires regular follow-up. Bush regeneration was acknowledged as lessening fire hazard in Mowbray Park West Chatswood; residents in Sunnyside Cres. have also felt safer as a result of work carried out by WEPA on the Sugarloaf Bush Regeneration project.

The recent fires have clearly indicated the need for increased funding for management of natural areas, both national parks and urban bushland managed by Councils. In Willoughby 80% of our Open Space is bushland (250ha) but the other 20% claims well over half the funding. Lane Cove, which has only 74ha of bush, spends nearly twice as much as Willoughby on its bushland and employs more than twice the number of staff.

The fires represent a great opportunity for bush regeneration in burnt areas to make several years progress in a short time, provided trained regenerators begin handweeding before weed regrowth or invasion becomes established.

The most important protection. Destruction of houses in an ordinary suburban setting at Como and Jannali shows that everyone is vulnerable. No amount of prescribed burning or clearing of public land will save a house which is not properly prepared. The CSIRO/Standards Assoc. of Aust. publication Buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas (1993) clearly describes the hazards posed by siting, design, construction materials, furnishings etc, and points out that the greatest threat is burning embers lodging in the structure, particularly the roof or via unprotected windows which have cracked as a result of radiant heat. This publication is essential reading and is based on results of the Ash Wednesday fire investigations (\$19.95 from CSIRO, North Ryde).

The recommendation of the Coronial Inquiry, which commences in May, may produce new information. More than likely it will point to measures recognised for many years but not implemented. Because the recent fires touched many who don't normally experience fire, the recommendations may lead to better education and preparation for future fire seasons.

A 2-day Fire Seminar will be held by the Nature Conservation Council on 24th and 25th June. Phone 247 4206 to be put on the mailing list. □

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NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

Please send to the Treasurer, Diana Jones, Box 6/77 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag.

The Crag is edited on behalf of the Castlecrag Progress Association (Box 6/77 Edinburgh Road, Castlecrag) by Helen Levett (958 3510) and Kerry McKillop (958 4516). Contributions and letters are most welcome.

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